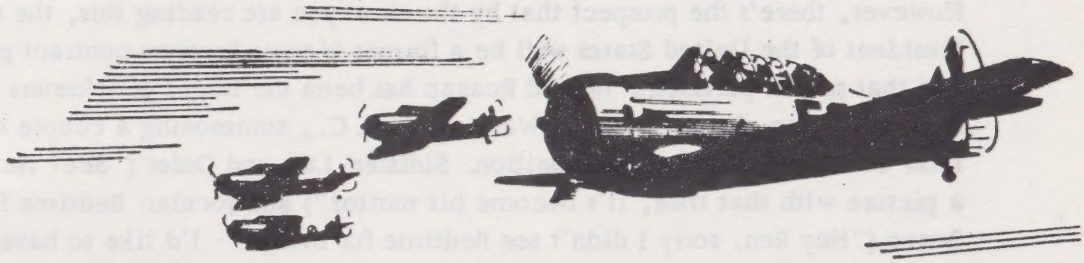
CAPTAIN GEORGE'S

Penny Dreadful

TORONTO, OCT. 31, 1980 NUMBER 610



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2nd WEEK

Shea's

THIS WEEK THE ENTIRE RECEIPTS OF THIS THEATRE—AND ALL OTHER FAMOUS PLAYERS THEATRES COAST-TO-COAST ... WILL BE USED TO PURCHASE THE NEW VICTORY LOAN BONDS' .....

FAMOUS PLAYERS

1942

A WEEKLY REVIEW

DON MILLER

ADVENTURES OF RONALD REAGAN: Politics has no place in these pages. However, there's the prospect that by the time you are reading this, the next President of the United States will be a former Warner Brothers contract player, and that sure is pertinent. Ronald Reagan has been the target of jokesters ever since he began glancing toward Washington D.C., summoning a couple of his later Universal efforts as ammunition. Sinister: Law and Order ("See? He made a picture with that title, it's become his motto!") and jocular: Bedtime for Bonzo ("Hey Ron, sorry I didn't see Bedtime for Bonzo -- I'd like to have that on ya!").

I was not immune from this japery. Early in the year I had a standard crack if asked about my intentions regarding Ronnie. I'd vote for him, I'd say, only if they resurrect Wayne Morris for Vice-President. Well, the Republican convention came along and Gerald Ford almost got the spot, and looking at him in profile, he did remind you of the late Mr. Morris, so it was a narrow squeak. Actually, the V-P candidate they picked is closer to Zachary Scott than Wayne Morris, but we'll let that pass. This was intended to be random vignettes of Reagan's tyro days as an actor, so no politicking.

Ronald Reagan made his first for Warners in 1937, and right from the start he was a cinch to turn into a handy guy to have around. They gave him the lead in a B-pic entitled Love Is on the Air, which was a remake of a Paul Muni picture called Hi, Nellie and would be produced a third time five years later as You Can't Escape Forever, with George Brent and, in the Reagan role, Brenda Marshall. Okay. Reagan was introduced in a budget job, but Warners did go to the trouble of giving him a special advance trailer for theaters in which he told the audience about himself. "I used to be a radio announcer, so I came to Hollywood to make a movie and what's it about? A radio station!" He had a nice grin and a nice speaking voice, and you liked him right away even if you didn't much like the film when you saw it. Not that it was that bad -- June Travis was in it too, a looker.

Thereafter Warners would stick Reagan in B-pics alternating with bits or featured roles in more prestigious productions. He'd even narrate a few one- and two-reel short subjects, like Howard Hill spearing fish with a bow and arrow, stuff like that. As stated, a handy guy to have around. He used to m.c. the annual Oscar broadcasts too, a cinch since he had a background of radio announcing.

What endeared him to these juvenile eyes was a series of four action films

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3

CAPTAIN GEORGE'S PENNY DREADFUL, a weekly review established in 1968, is published by the Vast Whizzbang Organization at Memory Lane, 594 Markham Street, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

DON DAYNARD

Fans of Laurel and Hardy will no doubt be shocked to hear of a plan by two Los Angeles music producers to re-edit the comedy team's films into one "brand-new, never-seen-before" feature!

Alan Douglas and partner Ross Firestone purchased the rights to the L & H films and are now editing them into one feature with an entirely new plot. The as-yet-untitled film, according to Los Angeles magazine, will be processed into colour and have new music and sound effects, both rechanneled into stereo. And, by feeding the boys' words individually into a computer, Stand and Ollie will even be able to recite all new lines!!

Now, I don't know about you, but I think this is somewhat akin to grave-robbing. As far as I'm concerned, Stan and Ollie's films are just fine as they are, thank you, and if I had my way, I'd say "keep your goddamn hands off 'em and let us enjoy them as we know 'em."

Douglas is the man who remixed and re-recorded Jimi Hendrix's albums that were released years after the musician's death, and regarding the L & H films, he says, "We're not destroying any other story line. We're keeping Laurel and Hardy in character. I believe this will be their best picture."

Well, I disagree. I only wish LA magazine had printed an address for this chap so we could all write him and tell him where to stick his project. Sideways!

DON MILLER continued

in which Reagan played the character of Brass Bancroft, secret service agent extraordinary. These things were turned out in serial fashion, didn't run more than an hour each, and were all action and little standing around. Eddie Foy Jr. was the comedy relief, and I liked them all, especially one called Code of the Secret Service.

Another early B that was really quite good was Accidents Will Happen, about fakery in insurance cases, in which Reagan played opposite Gloria Blondell, Joan's sister. The last B-pic he made for Warners was a mystery, Nine Lives Are Not Enough, released in 1942. Not bad. He played a Hollywood-type reporter. After that it was the service, ultimately politics.

PETE HARRIS

THE 'NEW' HOLLYWOOD: If one harbored the suspicion that the Hollywood film industry has gone completely bananas, that suspicion probably would be confirmed by an article in the Sept. 22 issue of New West magazine. The article, The Making of 'Hammett', was written by screenwriter Tim Hunter who calls it "the story of Francis Ford Coppola's production of Hammett, five years in perpetual 'development', an odyssey of collaborative film-making featuring the executive producer, two co-producers, two directors, three and a half and more writers, several studio executives and a star."

The saga begins with Joe Gores' evocative 1975 novel, Hammett, in which he recreated San Francisco of the late 1920s as the backdrop for a murder mystery in which struggling writer Dashiell Hammett puts aside his typewriter to uncover a conspiracy involving political corruption. Fred Roos, a mystery fan and a producer for Coppola's Zoetrope Studios, read the manuscript of Gores' novel in mid-1975 and, because he knew that Coppola "wasn't particularly a fan of the private eye genre," decided first to develop the project with director Nicolas Roeg before submitting it. "Francis took my word for it," Roos is quoted as saying. "He never read the book."

A year was spent on preliminaries, including sorting out the legalities, after which Gores wrote "a total of two and a half complete scripts" while Roeg began the search for an actor to play Hammett. He finally settled on Frederic Forrest, but United Artists, Zoetrope's distributor, said no, they wanted a major star for the film which was budgeted at $8-million. Gores finished his final draft in February, 1977. The search for a star went on, but finally Roeg "couldn't wait anymore and pulled out of the project."

German director Wim Wenders was hired and, says Hunter, became a Hammett fanatic, even going so far as to rent an apartment in San Francisco at 891 Post Street where Hammett and his character Sam Spade had lived. By September, 1978, Gores and Wenders had done the equivalent of three scripts. Ultimately, Gores agreed that the film should have a new writer. Tom Pope was hired and by March, 1979, a first draft was satisfactorily completed. Coppola then decided that, as a tryout, Pope's second draft would be taped as a radio show, with a cast including Gene Hackman and Ronee Blakley. The script didn't work as a radio play and it was back to square one with a new approach and a new writer -- Dennis O'Flaherty who wrote "four official drafts."

Principal photography on the film began in February, 1980, and throughout the 10-week shoot, rewriting went on constantly, until, finally, with the movie about 90 per cent complete, shooting was stopped -- without an ending on film. Eventually, Wenders put together a fine-cut and fully sound-mixed version of his 90 per cent of a film and did storyboards for a new ending, but no dice.

"Reshoots," writes Hunter, "are now postponed indefinitely, though the film is slated for March 1981 release. With the film 10 per cent away from completion, Zoetrope has hired a new writer -- Ross Thomas -- to fashion a new script around the film itself."